



News Release

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Contact: Ranger Terry Kiser
(650) 879-2025

Elephant Seal Guided Walks Available at Año Nuevo State Park

SACRAMENTO – Reservations open soon for popular great Northern Elephant Seal walks at Año Nuevo State Park in San Mateo County.

Guided walks led by experts in elephant seal behavior and history have attracted increasing interest every winter for more than 30 years. Elephant seals are visible year round, but people who hope to see the seals during the winter breeding season – December 15 through March 31 – can only access the breeding area while on a guided walk for everyone's protection.

Mark your calendars

On Saturday, October 17, school groups can start reserving their **School Group Walk** offered Monday through Friday mornings for 1st through 12th grade classes. A school group consists of 20 students with two adult chaperones. One chaperone is required for every 10 youths 17 years or under. Reservations are highly recommended and available by calling ReserveAmerica (800) 444-4445. Agents are available 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekends—except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Callers are limited to ordering four School Group Walks per call. Cost: \$21 per group, school bus parking is free.

On October 20, individuals, families and other groups can start making their reservations for the **Public Seal Walk**, for any dates up to 56 days in advance and as late as one day prior to their walk. For example: To take your walk for Saturday, January 2, the earliest you could make your reservation would be Saturday, November 7—the latest would be December 31. Reservations are recommended, but not required. For youth groups, one chaperone is required for every 10 youths 17 years or under. Reservations are available by calling ReserveAmerica (800) 444-4445. Agents are available 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekends—except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Online reservations are also available at <http://anonuevo.reserveamerica.com/>. Cost: \$7 per person. Children 3 and under are free. Parking is \$10 per vehicle, paid at the Park entrance.

Beginning December 2, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m., disabled individuals can make reservations for the exclusive **Equal Access Guided Walks**. These walks are available on weekends only, January 2 through March 28. Reservations are required and available by calling the park at (650) 879-2033. Cost: \$7 per person. Parking is \$10 per vehicle, paid at the park entrance.

Rain or Shine

These popular three-mile walks over rolling sand dunes and sloping terrain last about 2 ½ hours and are considered moderately strenuous. The first guided walk of every day will begin at 9 a.m., other walks will be held throughout the day. Visitors who are late will forfeit their reservations. Specific times will be offered when reservations are made.

Guided walks are conducted rain or shine. Visitors should prepare for an outdoor hiking adventure that may include high winds, heavy rains, and cold temperatures. Recommended clothing includes hooded rain gear, layered clothing, and sturdy walking shoes. For safety, use of umbrellas and baby strollers are not permitted on the walks. Bring your own food and beverages, as they are not sold at the park. Picnic tables are available for use before and after guided walks. It is advisable to bring bottled drinking water on the walk.

There are no ticket refunds or exchanges for cancellations, no shows, weather, or late arrivals. Refunds are issued only when the park staff must cancel a walk.

Location

The park is near the southern tip of San Mateo County, west of Highway 1, between the cities of Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay, approximately 1 ½ hour drive south from San Francisco. Reservations are recommended for these popular guided walks.

Background

Limiting visits to the breeding area since 1975 has allowed for the natural, undisturbed development of the elephant seal herd from 35 males to more than 5,400 animals, including the birth of more than 1,700 pups.

Adult seals begin arriving on the beaches by mid-December. Bulls weighing up to 5,000 pounds engage in battles for breeding access to the females. Pregnant females come ashore to have pups beginning in mid-December, with births reaching a peak by late January. Mothers nurse their pups for about a month before weaning their pup, mating, and departing back to sea. Birthing and mating activity peak by mid-February. By early March, most adult seals have returned to the sea. During March, hundreds of weaned pups remain behind to rest in the dunes and learn to swim in the tide pools.

Volunteer naturalists from the surrounding community take an intensive 2 1/2 month (65-hour) training course given by California State Parks, prior to the breeding season. During the guided walks, they and park staff will lead visitors among the huge marine mammals and explain both the story of the elephant seals and the other natural and cultural history of the area.

For more information on the elephant seals, the guided walk programs, and other features of Año Nuevo State Park, please call (650) 879-2025 or (650) 879-0227 (recording). You are also welcome to visit the park's Web site at <http://www.parks.ca.gov>.

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